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WILLIAM TIMOTHY CALL



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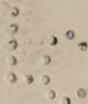
BLACKMAIL

AN EPISODE IN FINESSE

BY

WILLIAM TIMOTHY CALL

Price, 50 Cents



W. T. CALL

669 East Thirty-Second Street
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

1915

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PREFACE

ONE of the best story-tellers among American writers was the author of the Albatross novels. I suppose his work may be classed as trash, but there are half a dozen books in the score and more he wrote that seem to have been painstakingly thought out, and they made him dear to millions of readers. In his off-hand way of making the improbable appear real there is a peculiarly intimate quality that few of the masters of high grade fiction possess. He has recorded with surprise that he had received many letters asking whether the persons and occurrences he brought so close to his readers were real or invented. And he sincerely answered that they were real in his imagination.

There is a story by Amelia E. Barr that is much finer literature than the best of the Albatross novels—in fact, a work of art in fiction—that modern classic, “Jan Vedder’s Wife”—in which this singular property of *vraisemblance* is wonderfully shown.

I have often wished I had an endowment of the kind possessed by those writers, but that being denied me, I have been obliged in this bookine to resort to actualities which are verifiable. Of course, there are some lies in it. Yes, there are; but the important features in the narration, such as the Post Office, the Sun Building, Brooklyn Bridge, and Jamaica Bay, are all real.

W. T. CALL.

New York,
June, 1915.

BLACKMAIL

CHAPTER I

ON the first page of the eleven o'clock forenoon edition of a New York evening newspaper, June 12, 1914, there is an interesting account of the capture of a blackmailer. The head lines are of double column measure in the large full-face type sometimes used when a reporter gets hold of sensational details that may become a scoop, beat, or exclusive for his paper.

The early issues of the afternoon dailies are known to the staff as the home edition, the mail edition, the country edition, or by some other significant byname. I have long had a fondness for these first run issues, because

they frequently give entertaining or instructive miscellany that later in the day is killed to make room for what is regarded as important news.

Whether the article here referred to was printed because of its being the sort called in editorial rooms a "good story," or whether it was an exact account of an actual happening, I do not know. My interest was confined to the particulars as presented. One of New York's keenest business schemers once said to me: "A thing is as you present it."

Now here in print was a remarkable blackmailing case.

— What was the threat?

What was the plan?

How was the transfer to be made?

On which side of the contest were the brains — the real brains — the winner?

These were the questions that caused me to read every word of that narrative with eagerness. Others probably were interested in the account more or less, but I was greatly inter-

ested in it, for I had once done some careful work in this species of — shall I call it, in my case, strategy, knavery, daring, or dementia? I have no plea to make on that point.

By piecing together parts of the reporter's recital I am able to give here the essentials of the newspaper story without altering the words of the relator :

The idea of attempting to hold up the steamship company suggested itself to him when he saw the newspaper accounts and pictures of the big ocean giant, the *Aquitania*, which came over on her maiden trip a few weeks ago. The youth (he is 19 years old) declared that he was not only without an accomplice in his daring plot, but that he had not so much as mentioned it to any of his associates. He said he worked out the details of the scheme and composed the letters during brief periods of rest while running errands for a Broadway printing concern. He was moved to his Wild West undertaking by a desire to aid his mother, who is confined to her home in Brooklyn with an incurable disease. The elaborate way in which he went about his venture makes the authorities believe that he is a dangerous criminal. He admits that he once served a term in Elmira.

Three letters were received by the company before the steps were taken that resulted in the capture. The first came through the mail about three weeks ago, and the threat it carried was supposed to have reference to the new *Aquitania*. This message instructed the officers of the line to place an advertisement in a Sunday newspaper in token of their willingness to comply with the demand for money, after which arrangements for the actual transfer of the cash were to be made.

As for the payment of the sum stipulated, the blackhander specified that the company's agent should board the West Shore Railroad's fast train, the Buffalonian, at Weehawken last night, station himself on the rear platform, and at a signal of three blasts from a police whistle, which the writer was to give from a secreted position somewhere along the railroad track "at some point between Weehawken and Buffalo," toss the package off the train.

When the darkness fell the police captain took eighteen of the best detectives of the department, and two paper packages made up to represent paper money, and repaired to Weehawken. The captain took his stand on the rear of the Buffalonian with one of the packages in his hand, and a rifle within easy reach, while eight of the detectives, also heavily armed, took seats in the rear of the car.

Nine more detectives boarded a special train, which had been assigned to follow the Buffalonian to make sure that the trap did not fail through any slowness on the part of the blackmailer in getting into position or giving the signal for the first train.

As the Buffalonian sped into West View the captain heard the three whistle blasts. He immediately dropped his package over the platform railing. One of the detectives on the inside jerked the bellcord, and the train came to a quick stop. A red lantern was flashed, the special train hove to, and in less time than it takes to tell it nineteen armed detectives were swarmed along the railroad right of way. The youth was found in a clump of bushes, holding fast to the dummy package.

The blackmail letters indicated that the threat was to be consummated by placing dynamite in the coal bunkers of the steamship. The amount demanded by the blackmailer was \$10,000.

This account shows how easily professional detectives may outwit an unprofessional blackmailer who works without a confederate.

CHAPTER II

THERE is in most every person a gnawing desire to use his strength, to test his powers. We all love to plan and plot, to control and operate. It is a habit of consciousness — that curious attribute of being which Huxley regarded as the most wonderful thing in the world. And this recalls the remark to his mother of that fine but singular gentleman, Kenelm Chillingly, when a boy: “Mamma, are you not sometimes overpowered by the sense of your own identity?” Chillingly, by the way, knew that the physical basis of life may be relied upon to neutralize any evil effect from silly introspection.

The planning habit, begun in childhood, through association and imitation, becomes a charm in youth, a necessity in early manhood, a mania in middle life, and a despair in old age.

There was no attempt at fine writing in the trimmings of the article. The artistry lay in the circumstantial touches in narration such as mark the writings of N. P. Willis, Bayard Taylor, Fitzhugh Ludlow, and the bohemians of their day, whose aim was verisimilitude and easy reading. On the first perusal of the account I was captivated by the ingenuity of the idea — a man with a package of money, standing on the rear platform of a fast train with orders to toss the package off “at some point between Weehawken and Buffalo.” It appeared to be a very clever conception. Further consideration, however, brought up several puzzling questions that made the affair look dubious for both sides.

How was the blackmailer to get the dynamite into the coal bunkers, if the threat was to be taken seriously?

What strength was there in that kind of a threat, anyway?

How was the blackmailer sure his whistle would be heard by the man on the whizzing, thundering train?

Would not the sound of a police whistle be likely to excite the attention of any one within a wide radius?

Knowing just what was to happen, would it not be easy enough for the authorities to notify the police of each town along the route to patrol at a distance every section of track?

When he got the package why did the black-mailer have to wait in the bushes to be caught?

On the other hand, was it likely that so fast a train could be stopped soon enough by pulling the bell cord for the detectives to get back to the scene in time?

Would the special train follow the express so closely that the second party of detectives could get to the place in season to block the getaway—the prime essential in the plans of every sane crook?

These questions and several others not here put down are the kind that would cause a careful thinker to hesitate about expressing admiration for the farsightedness of either of the parties to the affair. Of course, I could

have cleared up these points by applying at the offices of the persons concerned, but, as previously stated, I had no curiosity in the matter beyond the tale as told. All blackmail schemes interest me in direct ratio to their feasibility, without regard to whether they are fact or fiction. It is the play of the strategy that titillates the intellect.

Blackmailing, because of its being a third degree test of acuteness, is one of the most fascinating subjects of thought in the categories of crime. To be able to cause a rich man to hand over a large sum of money for nothing, is a triumph in finesse. To be able to bring a man of real courage to his knees by means of a mere letter is to win a battle of brains. It is a contest in cleverness. In the patter of the profesh this idea is expressed sententiously thus: "It takes a fly mug to turn the trick."

The foundation on which the plotter builds his precious scheme is necessarily fear. You must not (that is, you ought not to) say

a person shows lack of courage until you get to the bottom of the matter, and learn what kind of fear is racking him. By reflection you will find that there are stronger animating forces in the workings of the human machine than courage. There are influences that may nullify courage. Love, for instance, may dominate, or expediency, or even indolence.

Various things of this kind I felt obliged to think out to my own satisfaction as preliminaries at the time I undertook to demonstrate the fine art of blackmail. To the superficial observer a tedious study of the minutiae of preparedness is finical, but that it is the method of experience in roguery is attested in the following words detached from the reminiscences of a detective: "It could be successfully carried only by men of brains and skill who had the patience to study their enterprise well before entering upon it. Few people have any idea of the amount of study put into such a job before any attempt to realize is made."

CHAPTER III

THE start of my adventure was made on the porch of a summer hotel. There were five men, including myself, lounging in the ample chairs, discussing without animation the bungling methods of blackmailers. It was the majority opinion that it is absurd to suppose the delivery of the money in such cases can be successfully forced unless the victim himself is afraid to try to outwit the party of the first part.

“The transfer,” said one, “must be made at some specified point, or between two given points; and money can be followed anywhere.”

“That is not necessarily true,” I ventured. “It is a question of close thinking. The ordinary thug or crook has not trained himself

along the lines of logical sequence. He has learned to rely too confidently on force and cunning. A great chess player safeguards himself against the accumulation of small advantages by his opponent. The crook scorns little things until he has been compelled to take them into his calculations. Not before he was driven to see the possible significance of fingerprints did he learn to wear gloves. It seems to me that the absurdity in this question lies in claiming that the money cannot be transferred without the detectives being able, when working with a free hand, to follow or surround it."

This speech was condemned as tommyrot, and the contention that followed led to the challenging question:

"Can you mention one, only one, possible method of effecting such a delivery?"

"Wel-l," I replied, "I was down at the Battery one day last spring, and happened to notice a young fellow releasing some birds from a kind of crate. The birds flew around

far up, straggled along over the East River, and in a little while disappeared. He told me they were homers bound for East New York. Now I want to know how detectives are going to follow such carriers, except in flying machines that cannot light on pigeon houses."

The merriment this caused upset the discussion; but the conclusion that a delivery could not be made without detection remained with me as a subject of thought, and when alone I tried to concoct a plan that would work in defiance of the best brains in the detective profession.

It was an agreeable antidote to sameness, and I got hold of a number of feasible schemes involving confederates. But what I wanted was a one-man game — my brain against the bunch. This became so much of a problem as soon as examined for the other side that nothing but an inclination for intellectual pastimes kept me at it. Solutions are apt to come like inspirations when we have worked persistently, and one day just the idea I was looking for came to me.

First I made sure that my part in the transaction should be simple as well as practicable. Then I went to work on the other end, and examined the details. Not in a day, nor in a week, but finally, I became convinced that if I were a detective I could not beat that kind of game. So I concluded that it was time for me to meet in person or by letter the challenge of my friends of the hotel porch. But would they not laugh it all away as they had the pigeon notion? They probably would handle it sarcastically, or at least say: "That is clever; but is it pragmatic — will it work?"

The only way to stop that inevitable query was to try the project. So I decided that I would make a job of the matter, and actually blackmail some one. The justification for this rash resolve was that I would return the money with a full account of the genesis of the affair, and a promise that I would some day disclose my identity.

Mice and men are not proof against accident. I must cover possibilities as well as

probabilities. I wrote out a synopsis of the experiment, including my intentions, and put it away in a sealed envelope. This, with the fact that I had no real incentive for a criminal action of the kind, seemed to me insurance enough for the occasion. That there was uncovered risk in the undertaking I fully realized. It is not the business of the police to know the difference between an experiment in crime and a felony, and judges are usually so absorbed in the importance of their trust that they are apt to consider only the serious side of a practical joke. But if there were no charm in danger life would be duller than it is.

The last stage of the preparatory labor was difficult. Whom should I blackmail? It is easy to choose this kind of victim for some one else, but I found it hard to pick one for myself. Kidnaping, working for a ransom, was completely out of the running, not only because it necessitated accomplices, but because it spelled cruelty, and could not possibly be turned into a humorsome adventure.

As to the amount of money to be demanded, that must be small — must not exceed \$5,000. In fact, that appeared to be in every respect the ideal sum. It would give the impression of a necessary levy rather than a trumped-up tribute. It would indicate extreme earnestness. The victim ought to be a man physically, mentally, and financially O. K.

These essentials having been determined, I went to the club day after day, and sized up the older men, who begin to come in regularly about eleven o'clock, and lounge around to nurse their livers over the noon hours. Most of them I concluded would make a big fuss about \$5,000, real money, and for them to be obliged to endure the bother of blackmail was distressing to imagine. Turning my attention to the afternoon crowd, the younger men, who assemble from four o'clock on for pool, clandestine poker and the uplift of the bar, I found no desirable \$5,000 subject among them. Then I bought from an addressing company for eight dollars a selected list of persons

rated as worth \$100,000 or more. This was a useless expense. Next I turned to a directory of directors, to an élite directory, and finally to the news of high society in the dailies and weeklies — in vain.

The hunt was continued in a rather discouraged way in many directions for nearly a month. The impression was gaining ground with me that after all the chief difficulty in blackmail was finding a suitable victim. But at last in the same old way the flash came. It arrived indirectly through overhearing a remark. One man said to another: "Why do you always look away off somewhere for something you could find right under your nose?"

That was an amusing bit of homely wisdom, and I lowered the paper I was trying to read while holding on to a strap in a crowded car, and looked about. *He* was there.

I would blackmail a recently graduated college man with whose name, face, and money qualifications I happened to be acquainted.

He had lately become engaged, and I knew the young lady's name. I was not personally acquainted with either of the affianced. One of the attractive features of the selection was the strength of the threat it suggested. That was a point of the utmost importance.

CHAPTER IV

ALL the conditions and circumstances about the selected victim were to my liking, and I analyzed them with confidence.

He was of the Samurai—that class of under-nobility (in Japan) who place the title of gentleman before that of Lord. He had not had time for his faith in the honor and glorious privilege of living to become dull, and accepted the joy of life at its fiat value. He wore good clothes, and wore them so well that one would hardly notice that they were good. His type may be seen in numbers now and then in the semi-exclusive and mildly rich little cafés half concealed in the massive buildings of the lower part of downtown New York. They may be observed stepping strongly along the old lanes now called Pine

and Cedar Streets. When they mingle in the vapid life of the garish restaurants of the theater zone they appear unvulgarlarized.

A young man of this grade I knew could not be frightened by any crude threat. He must be touched in the quick to unman him.

But I believed I had him, for *she* was his princess. Here was a case of the later chivalry, and I knew how to pierce his armor.

To give distinctness to this part of the groundwork of my plan, I turned to marked passages in certain books on my shelves, and found that *she* had been word-painted by the portly Chesterton thus: "Her brown hair framed one of those magic faces that are dangerous to all men, but especially to boys and men growing gray." That was the elusive idea exactly—"One of those magic faces!"—that was Alice! And no wonder; for her mother was that beautifully feminine and singularly fine creature who had served as "Teacher" in Sally McLean's "Cape Cod Folks."

And the kind of spell that held them I discovered beside a telltale mark in Tourgee's powerful "Bricks Without Straw," thus: "Their eyes spoke; and they greeted each other with kisses of liquid light when their glances met."

What a motive for me to operate on! The threat would not be difficult to frame up. I felt strong.

CHAPTER V

SEPARATING the Heights in Brooklyn from the East River is a cañon extending from the old Wall Street Ferry to Fulton Ferry. It is called Furman Street. On the side near the river are warehouses and a few solid, grim-looking buildings for storage or manufacturing. The opposite side of this somewhat perilous thoroughfare is the wall that forms the abutment of the terraced gardens of residences on the Heights. This long stretch of wall is nearly as high as the buildings across the street, and has no stairways.

It occurred to me one day, while musing over the curious effect of this great wall, that by means of a cord a person on top of the wall could receive a package from a person in the street, and disappear long before any one

could get to the spot from below. The person on top of the wall, however, would be exposed to the gaze of any one who might be in a nearby window.

That would not do. But the idea seemed good, and I wondered whether it would not work out neatly in a nice secluded place on the Palisades. Perhaps it would; but I knew well enough that if I went to the Palisades I should find the right spots scarce and the real difficulties plentiful.

This fiddling with notions, however, was not waste. It was practice, and helpful to me in getting from the complex and difficult to the simple and easy. I was in no haste now that I had the chief problems well in hand, and I looked around without impatience until I hit on the method and place that suited me.

It is now proper for me, as party of the first part, to step aside and let the selected victim, as party of the second part, take up the narration, also in the first person. The manner in which his story was obtained for these

pages will be made clear farther on. It is pleasant to state that his story shows how accurately my analysis of effects and motives had been, and that the unusual pains I had taken with seemingly extraneous matters were correct procedure.

But it is perhaps well for me first to run over some general considerations in order to clear the way for his straightforward recital.

CHAPTER VI

WHETHER to include in the threat the injunction that he must do his part secretly was a point to be considered. I believed I could make him unwilling to let any one know anything about the transaction. But this would not be the kind of test I wished to make. So I decided to ignore that phase of the matter, and let him do as he pleased. He would then undoubtedly get the best detective talent he could command, and it would be my business to outwit them. That, in fact, was the kernel of the nut.

There was one item in the long list of things to think of that made me shiver. I had planned to use the United States mails. Yet I had no longing for a tussle with the Secret Service. The kind of men the National

Government somehow gets hold of, in spite of the long reach of the fingers of politics, is exceedingly offensive to fine criminal taste. But there is no substitute for the mails, and the thing to do was to make the victim act so expeditiously that there would not be one chance in a hundred of his informing the postal authorities. By limiting his time, I believed he would go to a first class detective agency for advice or action.

The ordinary plain clothes men of the city police do their work well enough, but depend so much on stool pigeons, informers, and "throwing a scare" into suspected persons, that they are not nicely adjusted to fine work.

On the other hand, the detectives of highly exciting stories and sensational plays are not such as I would have to deal with. To get as much information as possible about the methods of the sort of persons who would probably be my natural enemies for a brief period, I read such biographies and reminiscences of their fellows as I could pick up in the old

book stores. In one little book by "An Old Detective" I ran across a paragraph that confirmed my general impressions, as follows:

"Nor does the detective have recourse to mysterious disguises in accomplishing the difficult task of shadowing. When engaged on a long job he will put on a different hat and a different suit of clothes about once a week, just as ordinary citizens do; but as for altering his appearance in any other way he never thinks of it. False beards, false mustaches, queer goggles, and lightning changes of clothing and character only exist in the imaginations of writers who in their books and stories have made of the detective a creature such as never existed on this or any other planet, and one grotesquely unlike the real article. Not only are such theatrical disguises unnecessary, but they would defeat the purpose, and result in the detective's immediate betrayal; for there never was invented either on or off the stage any makeup involving false wigs, false noses, etc., that would not be detected by the casual

observer as surely as he would detect the presence of a cork leg in some passerby."

How the detectives would go about the matter in my case I could form no satisfactory opinion, and I did not care what they would do or try to do.

My quarry will now do the talking.

CHAPTER VII

IN the second week of October I, the so-called party of the second part, received at my home an annoying letter. It was inclosed in a hotel envelope, and was written with a blunt lead pencil on the yellowish paper of the common commercial or school pad. It had been laboriously printed out, with every letter a capital. There was no shading, ornament, or other characteristic so far as I observed. Type of that style, I understand, is called Gothic. There was no punctuation or paragraphing. It looked like a page of incunabula, and ran as follows:

I must have five thousand dollars and you must give it to me. I may give it back some day. I am not a crank. I am in awful danger. You can save me. If you refuse I shall give up, but I swear you shall suffer first. As this is the last cry of one man

to another, do you dare hesitate to save a soul from hell? You have done me no harm. You do not know me, but will if you refuse. Next Monday stand on the steps of the New York Sun Building at noon, 12 o'clock, for five minutes to show that you do not refuse. Then you will get a letter telling you what to do. If you are not there Alice will be disfigured for life.

There was no signature. The communication was disturbing, but not alarming. It was evidently intended for what some persons might consider a practical joke. The threat against Alice, to whom I was engaged, showed that it was probably a prank of some young person, perhaps an office boy, or possibly a schoolgirl crowd eager for a lark. I put the missive into my pocket, and dismissed the matter from my mind.

The next morning, Sunday, just before I got up, it occurred to me that the letter might perhaps prove to be no joke, if ignored. What if the threat should be carried to the point of giving Alice an actual scare? From this notion I passed to the possibility of some

one's throwing acid at her in the rage of despair, and before I was fully dressed I had worked myself up into a state of alarm.

If the threat had been made against me alone, I would have known just what to do. But Alice! And what would her mother say about me if anything did happen? And what would they all say if I took the letter to Alice, and left it to her family to decide? Would they surround her for weeks with detectives? Would they pack her off for a long stay? Would they offer to give me \$5,000 to relieve them of the mystery and the worry?

The problem of how to treat that absurd letter was not so easily cleared as I had at first supposed. Having spoken to no one about the matter, I decided during the forenoon that I would rather pay the \$5,000, if necessary, than stand the anxiety.

In this state of mind I showed the letter to my uncle, a corporation lawyer living at the Plaza, whose advice I had occasionally sought in personal matters. He was more grave

about it than I expected, and urged me to go without delay to Police Headquarters for an expert opinion. I replied that that would not do at all, as they would surely make a case of it, which might bring our names into the papers. Then he said I must see the chief of some first class detective agency.

This I did Monday morning.

The Chief, either for business reasons or for something he saw in the appearance or wording of the letter, advised me to appear on the steps of the Sun Building at the appointed time, and to bring the next letter, if any, to him.

This I agreed to do.

The feeling I had when standing on the steps those five minutes was a singular mixture of sensations. There were three detectives at points near by, but the expected did not happen. We had concluded that the joker or jokers would come up in a merry way, and say they had decided to let me out with a luncheon at Mouquin's at my expense. If this

had happened the joke was to be turned on to them, as wrath had taken the place of indignation. The detectives found nothing in the passing crowds to arouse their suspicions, and I caught no face that indicated anything significant to me. I learned afterward that the observer had seen me through one of the window openings in the approach to the Brooklyn Bridge.

That evening the second letter came. It was made up in the same way as the first, and ran as follows:

Put fifty one hundred dollar bills in a strong envelope, take that with you and ask for a letter at the Post Office at 12 o'clock to-morrow, Tuesday.

This letter I took at once to the home of the Chief, and he told me to be at his office soon after ten o'clock in the morning. He said the time was so short that he would have to work a good part of the night to get together the force he wanted, and to map out his plan. He remarked that he did not know how far

the affair might be carried, and asked me about the expense to which I was willing to go. I inquired what the chances were of his getting his man, if it proved to be a serious matter. He replied that he could surely get him or her if given a free hand, and if I would do what he instructed me to do. I told him to go ahead, and spare no expense, but to make sure that there should be no failure. I said that it must be done in such a way that I should not have to go through the thing a second time. I did not want to get a letter telling me to try again, this time alone — without detectives. The only other point I insisted on was that it must be real money in the envelope. He hesitated there, and then agreed to that stipulation. If he was sure of getting his man I did not see why he hesitated about my using real money; but he did hesitate, and he made the concession unwillingly.

His instructions then were to get the bills as soon as the banks opened in the morning,

and to be at his office as early as possible. In the meantime I was to have a black band put on a brown derby hat, and to wear the thing.

There were at least a dozen persons seated in the Chief's office when I arrived with the money. They were quarter-masked, and wore dusters or raincoats. Some of these individuals were women. The Chief explained this spectacular feature by stating that it was merely for the purpose of enabling them to look me over without my being able to recognize them at any turn of events, thus avoiding action on my part that might be a lead for suspicious eyes.

He told me to place the letter I was to call for at the Post Office in the outer left hand pocket of my coat. That pocket would be picked by one of his force. Any other communication I received was to be put in the same pocket for the same purpose.

I suggested a revolver, but he said that might lead to the defeat of his plans, and

would not help me keep my wits about me, which was an important condition to success in this sort of thing. He drilled into me the necessity of finding ways to cause delay should I come to a place at any time that was so exposed his people could not get near enough to me for their purposes. Finally he filled my right hand pocket with chopped paper of about the fineness of confetti disks. That was not to be used unless the situation made it necessary for me to leave traces of my course. I asked him whether he thought the affair a hoax, and he replied that it might be, but that he must take no chances in the preparations.

The raincoat force had gone into another room, and while waiting for the appointed hour to go to the post office I pumped the Chief. He was perfectly frank, and displayed none of the wise looks and mysterious poses of the traditional detective. He reminded me of a full-habited, quiet-nerved doctor of my acquaintance, who is a rather fine fellow in spite of the ethics of the profession he adorns.

He showed me how the bills in the envelope had been recorded and marked for identification by an assistant while we were talking. The marks were a few little dots in India ink and some slight curlycues made as continuations of the engraved curves. He said the size of his force was unusual for this kind of case, but that the precautions were desirable, although not more than two or three might be called upon to do anything decisive.

He said his theory was that the delivery would be made in some nearby office building, perhaps by passing the envelope from the window of one building across an open space to an adjoining building. Possibly I would be called upon to throw the envelope into an automobile as it passed me in some street at a corner affording a clear view in all directions. At any rate he had provided three fast automobiles, and had distributed his people among them in such groups that they would not at once be spotted by sharp eyes as detectives. The smallness of the amount demanded

indicated not more than one accomplice, he thought. He had no doubt there was at least one confederate, as crooks, even more than ordinary persons, crave the moral support of a side-partner.

Yes, he said, he had consulted a handwriting expert, who had found nothing in the communication but a few indications of a general nature. There was a sharp finish to the lettering that pointed to a person of a higher class than the usual blackmailer. Besides, although there was evidence of unusual care, the habits of the writer made him forget himself, and he had not been able to keep from automatically putting in a comma and two periods. The most significant thing, however, was the wording of the message. There was no fire in it. The whole thing was mechanical and tame.

"That may be," I replied; "but it did its work all right."

"Well," he answered, "that is what we call a subjective effect. You are not in a judicial state of mind."

The Chief here smiled, and added: "This is going to cost you something."

"But you seem to feel sure of getting him," I ventured.

"Oh, of course we'll get him," he replied.

He said the fact that I had not been instructed to provide myself with plenty of expense money showed that there was to be no long journey. With a final caution for me not to be self-conscious about my hat, and to go slow at any place where a detective could not safely keep me in sight, he called time.

I went to the post office, and the promised letter was delivered to me. It was similar in appearance to the others. I opened it at the writing stand, and read as follows:

Take Smith Street car at Brooklyn Bridge.
Get off at Church Avenue. Go to barroom
on the corner. Ask for letter for you.

I went to the bridge, as instructed, and the letter was taken from my pocket in the crowd waiting for the car, as I knew by a slight nudge. I felt sure a detective went on the

car with me, but could not pick him or her out. The journey of about forty minutes was uneventful. As I entered the saloon I saw the new letter on the glasses in front of the mirror. I asked for a mild fizz, and inquired whether there was any mail for me in care of the place. The letter was delivered without comment.

I did not open it at once, but passed out, and stood on the curb, where I broke the seal. I knew the automobiles must be in the neighborhood, but none of them was in sight. I was curious to know where this letter would be taken from my pocket. It was not secured at once; but as I walked slowly about, waiting for a car, an ordinary-looking woman came up to me, and asked the way to Fort Hamilton Parkway. She got the letter neatly while I was shaking my head and telling her that I did not know. This communication read:

Take car on Church Avenue going east.
Get off at Flatbush Avenue. Go to cigar
store next to bank. Get letter for you.

There was no one in the cigar store but the saleswoman and a young fellow who was getting some cigarettes. I bought a cigar, asked for mail, received the letter, opened and read it in the store, and the boyish appearing chap got it there. This amused me a little as I had not thought of him in that capacity. This letter was not so brief as the others, and I wrote out its points on the margin of a newspaper I carried for occasional diversion. It read as follows:

Take Flatbush Avenue car to Bergen Beach. You may have to change cars twice. Soon after passing through the woods at the Beach stop the car, and go to Biggle's Hotel, which is the first place you come to on the shore. Ask for a letter.

Now I felt that I was nearing my journey's end, and in about half an hour I noticed that I was being led to a place it would be difficult for the detectives to reach unobserved. The hotel was isolated, and any one approaching it could be plainly seen.

I had been obliged to change at the car yard,

or depot as it is called, since the last leg of the trip is by a single buffalo, or shuttle, car, which runs to the so-called Beach. The car track, I observed, lay along a made road for half a mile or more across a wide stretch of marsh, and there was no other way to get down there without wading and swimming. In the car there were three passengers besides myself, but I felt sure there was no detective in the group. They all knew the conductor and motorman, and were unmistakably familiar with the affairs of that out-of-the-way place.

How the detectives were to get over that part of the route without being spotted, in case of a watcher, mystified me. An automobile might have reached the car yard before I got there, and could have gone on to the woods, or grove ahead of me, but only at the risk of being suspected. Three of the detectives did get to the hotel ahead of me, however, and I learned that they had gone there in the covered delivery wagon of a grocer whose place of business was in the old town of Flatlands, near

the car yard. Two of them got into the hotel without undue exposure, ordered beer, and were sitting at a round table when I arrived. The third was slowly driving back toward the woods when I left the car, but I thought nothing of it.

As I walked to the hotel I was glad I had actual money in the envelope, as the place I had come to might be first class for crabbing, eeling, and clamming, but was too much like a deserted village of shacks to invite stratagem on my part. The woman in charge of the premises asked me two or three questions before bringing out my letter. She was soon satisfied, however, that I was there for the purpose of making arrangements for a fishing party, and paid no further attention to me. I opened the letter within ten feet of the two men. It was possible, of course, that they were accomplices. The letter surprised me, as I expected to have to hand the money over right there, or be made to go to a room in the hotel for that purpose. It read:

Go out on pier to sign on boathouse which reads, No Fishing Allowed. Behind this sign, under the edge of the roof is a hole. Put your hand in, and take out the letter there.

I put this letter into my pocket, and began to loiter the best I could. One of the men asked me the time of day. I told him it was half past three. He inquired whether I wanted to hire a boat, and walked toward the door as if to point one out, taking the letter as he passed. I was not particularly astonished at this, and went out on the porch, sparing for time, as I knew neither of them would dare follow me. There seemed to be no way for them to get at the next letter, which was almost surely the last, without exposure on the very verge of the delivery. I went alone out on the pier. No one followed me. Under the corner of the sign I found this message:

Hire a rowboat from the man in the boat-house or on the float. Go alone. Look east. Look at church steeple across the water.

Row fast straight for it. Look for white rag on stick in grass. Go to it. Tie end of string you find there tight round envelope. Row back. Good-by.

All I could do in that situation was to follow instructions. That the detectives could get this final message from my pocket appeared hopeless. I hired a rowboat from the man on the float, and started in the direction of the church steeple alone, and with the letter still in my pocket. I felt compelled to row naturally to avoid suspicion, and the boat moved with annoying rapidity through the quiet shallow water. I wondered what would have happened in case of a squall so violent that I could not have gone out in the boat. The distance I had to row looked to be less than half a mile, and the steeple appeared to be far inland. The detective had not been able to get this final message.

I saw that the arm of Jamaica Bay I was crossing was continued far away in flats, marsh, and meadow, and that the automobiles

could not go around in time, even if the detectives had known my destination. For all any one on shore could tell I might, and probably would, proceed up a creek into the vast stretch of marsh. To follow me with a motor boat would be worse than useless.

I was now more than glad that I had not left all the details to the Chief, but had insisted on using actual money. I wanted the thing over — settled once for all. Every man has to pay the price of his happiness, in one way or another. Mine was humiliating; but, after all, I was doing my part, and would later on see what could be done to clear up the matter. Such were my thoughts.

On landing, my first inclination was to follow the course of the stout dark-colored cord through the boggy soil and meadow grass to the bushy lair about three hundred feet distant. The difficulty of doing this quickly not only gave my antagonist time to get away, but from his place of concealment he could hold me up, if so inclined. The wisdom of the

Chief in not allowing me to have a revolver was now apparent, and precluded the possibility of my acting rashly.

So I tied the envelope with the string, without attempting any trickery with the knot, knowing the light envelope would slide over the grass without catching, slumped to the boat, rowed rapidly across to the Beach, and about an hour and a half later faced the Chief in his office.

CHAPTER VIII

THE party of the second part having related his side of the affair, I, the party of the first part, here resume the recital.

Safely screened by bushes, with a hundred yards of cord between me and the white rag, I saw the victim making his way with good even strokes across the narrow stretch of open water. With the field glasses I had I was able to make sure he was alone, and to watch out for any preparations to follow him in a motor boat.

I had covered the minutest details to avoid detection, even to getting a pair of second-hand shoes with broad soles, so my footprints would not be a clew. I had reached the scene more than an hour before the boat was hired, and had made the arrangements

without interruption, as that part of the shore is a forsaken region, with no house or other building within reach of the voice. Even if a chance stroller had come that way I should have had no fear for my personal safety. No such unlikely thing occurred, and I saw the victim steadily approaching.

When he was well advanced I felt that my plan was a success, and I could not help imagining the chagrin of my friends of the hotel porch. The rower seemed to look about him as if taking in the advantages the situation gave me. Whether he was determined or discouraged I could not know — but the getaway was mine. Once in turning about to make sure he was headed in the right direction an oar slipped from the rowlock into the water. This was disturbing to me, and he appeared awkward in recovering it. The incident, natural enough in itself, had a curious effect on my tense mind. I became strangely suspicious. I began to feel chilly sensations. A reaction was setting in. I seemed to view

all I had done as in a swift-moving panorama. I had visions. Something like a dreadful mirage hung over the glistening boat, and I saw as distinctly as if it were actually there in the sky the outlines of a monstrous telephone. The town of Canarsie was but a short distance away. I visualized a horde of policemen running in every direction to the shore. Not a second was to be lost, and not a fraction of a second was lost by me, at least. My only purpose now was to get as far from the scene as possible. Once well inland I was free to think. The vision was blessed.

In talking over the matter that night with a friend, I was asked why in the world I had not thought of the telephone before. This seemed unexplainable, but on reflection I found that my mind had been so filled with the idea of separating the victim from his shadows, and so obsessed by the deserted condition of the field of action, that there was no room for the commonplace.

My self-sufficiency was wrecked, but was propped up a little when I learned later that the victim himself admitted that the telephone did not enter his thought in that outlandish place. Gradually I recovered enough confidence in my acumen to lay down the principle, that the difference between a clever amateur and an ordinary professional in any line seems to lie in their appreciation of the significance of the commonplace.

As I had seen no Canarsie policemen, and did not know what had become of the money, it was my plain duty to communicate with the victim. The telephone was my first thought now, and I called him up. He said he was intensely curious to know what scared the fellow away. I told him to state the amount of expense he had been put to in recovering the money, and he would surely be reimbursed. He asked me whether I was the man, and then begged me to meet him, on a gentleman's footing, assuring me that anxiety and anger had been displaced by a desire to hear my side of the affair.

So I arranged to go to his house with a check book in my pocket. The meeting was an agreeable one. He was jolly about the matter, and apologized for the size of the bill of expense. He said the detectives had taken him at his word, and had spared no expense. The bill was made out "To Professional Services," and called for a check for \$943.75. He said that even reckoning the services of the principals at \$100 a day each, the maximum charge of most experts in other affairs, it looked excessive. I was unwilling to dispute the bill, however. I suppose it was classed as "a thousand-dollar job."

The next day we called on the Chief, and I took his sneering banter in good part. He explained some things to me about blackmail with the purpose of convincing me of the hopelessness of my undertaking. He showed me some messages from blackmailers that I looked over with much interest.

The Chief pooh-poohed the idea that a delivery could be successfully effected, unless

the victim himself obstructed the detectives with conditions, or broke down in doing his part.

“My scheme,” I said, “worked perfectly in all respects except for the one plain thing I omitted to think of.”

“That is always the way,” he replied. “There would be no successful detectives but for some one little thing.”

“But,” I persisted, “if I had staged the affair out of range of the telephone, what would you have done?”

“That,” he replied, “is in the nature of a professional secret, which I do not care to discuss.”

I think that was a bluff, but I do not know.

Should my friends of the summer hotel happen to see this narrative (the title may attract them) they will know the outcome of our contention. Otherwise they shall not get it from me.

THE END

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